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THE
M A N N E R S
OF THE
A N C I E N T
CHRISTIANS.

EXTRACTED FROM A FRENCH AUTHOR,
By JOHN WESLEY, M. A.
LATE FELLOW OF LINCOLN COLLEGE, OXFORD.

PHILADELPHIA:

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1795.

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1792

THE MANNERS, &c.

CHAP. I.

Of the Life of Christ.

1. **A**S the Christian religion is not an invention of men, but the work of God, it received its full perfection at the beginning of it. For who can imagine, the apostles were ignorant of any truth necessary or useful to salvation? Or that any thing has been since found out touching the conduct of life, more wise and excellent than what Jesus Christ taught them? It is among the first Christians therefore, that we must look for a pattern of the most perfect life, and by consequence of the most happy, which can be upon earth.

2. Let us begin with the life of Christ himself, the model and source of all perfection. In his very childhood he sets us an example, by his teachableness and obedience to his parents. Of the rest of his youth we only know, that he lived in the little town of *Nazareth*, passing for the son of a carpenter, and working as one himself. In such obscurity he, who came to be the light of the world, chose to pass the greatest part of his life. Thirty years he lived a private life, and only three or four in public, to shew us, that a private life is best for the generality of men: and that

that there is only a small number who ought to act in public, so far as the order of God, and the love of their neighbour require it.

3. Before he began his great work, he prepared himself for it, by fasting and prayer. And having afterwards been tempted of the devil, to shew, he is able to succour us when we are tempted, he went forth to seek and to save that which was lost. He shewed that he came from God by his miracles. And even these gave him matter of many virtues; of simplicity, humility, patience. He wrought them without any pride or ostentation; he seldom stayed till he was asked to do them; and then, only to exercise, or to make known, the faith of those that asked him. He gives the glory of all to his Father. "I can of myself, says he (that is, as man) do nothing. My Father who abideth in me, he it is that doth the works."

4. What patience was it to bear that incredible multitude, which continually followed him, who pressed to touch him, who threw themselves upon him, and were often ready to overwhelm him? If he went into a house, all the city gathered together at the door, and gave him no time, so much as to eat. So that he could no longer come into the towns, unless in secret; but was forced to stay abroad in the deserts: and even thither the people followed him in great multitudes, as appears by the five thousand, whom he fed there. Hence it was, that he retired to the mountains to pray, that he employed the nights therein, and that he slept when he could, and as he could; as in the ship, during the storm.

His

5. His life was now more laborious, than when he worked with his hands. Indeed he had not time to work in; insomuch that he suffered women to minister unto him of their goods, and even kept some money by him. Of this he made *Judas* the keeper. So much did Jesus esteem money! He gave alms of the little he had, and sometimes he had none at all. Indeed he lived all along in great poverty. He had not where to lay his head. At his death, he had no goods, but his clothes. He came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister. He made his journeys on foot, and continued walking even till the heat of the day. For it was at noon that he sat down, weary as he was, on the well, where he met the woman of *Samaria*. And though he was the Lord of nature, we find not that he wrought any miracle for his own convenience, or to spare his own pains. The angels ministered unto him only once, to shew what was his due, had he pleased to use it.

6. All his carriage was simple, easy, natural, lively. He looked them in the face, with whom he spake: as the rich young man. It is often said, "He stretched forth his hand unto them;" often, that he made use of such other particular gestures, as were suitable to the occasion. Sometimes his very looks expressed pity, or grief, or indignation: at other times, tenderness; as when he took up the children in his arms, and laid his hands upon them.

7. With all this plainness and simplicity of behaviour, he preserved a wonderful dignity. He was always serious. We find him twice in tears: but it is not said, that he ever laughed. He asked nothing of any man, following his own

maxim, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." All men sought him out and ran unto him. He conversed with all, without any meanness of behaviour, and yet with the utmost condescension; being easy of access to all; yea to Publicans and Sinners. He condescended to eat, and to lodge with them, yea to let a woman that was a sinner touch him, and perfume his feet; a delicacy that seemed quite opposite to his poor and mortified life.

8. As he came into the world to instruct mankind, he taught continually both in public and private: inasmuch that men admired the power by which he spoke, and the gracious words that came out of his mouth. His discourse was simple and clear, without any ornament, but lively and natural figures. Sometimes, he speaks by actions, as when he bids *John's* disciples, "Go tell unto *John* what ye have seen and heard." And generally, his words are few. He lays down great principles, without troubling himself to draw consequences, or to prove them. Indeed they carry in themselves the light of truth, which only wilful blindness can resist. When he does use proofs, they are those of sensible reasonings and familiar comparisons. His miracles were the strongest proofs, and best suited to all understandings. These were equally apprehended by the learned, as *Nicodemus*, and the unlearned, as the man born blind. He often joins thereto the authorities of the law and the prophets, shewing that his doctrine came from the same wisdom, and that the Old Testament and the New were built on the same divine foundation.

9. That

9. That his disciples might have the full benefit of his example, he lived with them in common, as one family. They followed him wherever he went; they ate and lodged with him; they had opportunity of studying him continually. He spared no pains to instruct them. What they understood not in his public discourses, he explained to them in private; treating them as his friends, and telling them all things, as they were able to bear them. He bore with the utmost patience, their dulness, their ignorance, their vanity, and all their faults, and laboured without ceasing to correct them.

10. But he had other disciples besides the twelve: for all who believed and were baptized were called his disciples. St. Paul mentions above 500 of them, who together saw him after his resurrection. So that the church even then consisted of two parts: the people, simply called *The disciples* or *The brethren*, and those whom Christ had set apart for ministering in public: such were first, *The apostles*, and then the *seventy*, whom he chose, and sent two and two before his face.

11. The different degrees of love wherewith our Lord loved different persons are worthy a serious reflection. He hath taught us that every man is our neighbour, whom we are to love as ourselves: and he accordingly loved all the world: yea, he gave his life for all. Yet he loved his disciples in a particular manner, and above the rest of them, his apostles; above the rest of the apostles, St. Peter and the sons of Zebedee; and above all, St. John. Thus by his own example hath he authorized us to regard some

some persons with a particular affection, and shewn, that peculiar friendship is not inconsistent with universal charity.

12. But in his sufferings chiefly hath "He left us an example, that we should tread in his steps." Being like us in all things, except sin, he felt all the inconveniencies of life; hunger, thirst and weariness and pain: and the state he was in, the night before his passion, in the garden, plainly shews, that he was sensible like us, of grief and fear and sadness. Add to these his sense of the hardness of men's hearts, and the contradiction of sinners. But he suffered all, and particularly in his passion, with an invincible constancy. He who with a word could have confounded his accusers and judges together, opened not his mouth. He stood unmoved as a rock in the midst of all insults, reproaches, outrages. On the very cross he possessed his soul in patience. Even there retaining composure of mind, he prays for his murderers; he accepts the faith of the penitent thief; he provides for his mother's comfort; he finishes the accomplishment of the prophecies; he commends his spirit to God.

C H A P. II.

Of the Church at Jerusaleem.

1. **A**FTER the apostles had received the Holy Ghost, they were living images of Jesus Christ. And by them all the following servants of

of Christ were to form their hearts and lives. So St. Paul to the *Corinthians*, *Be ye followers of me, as I am of Christ*: and to the *Philippians*, *Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so, as ye have us for an example*.

2. Thus they taught by their lives as well as their words. But they chose out some of the believers, whom they taught in a more particular manner, as Jesus Christ had instructed them. These were with them continually wherever they went: these followed them in all their journies, and were appointed by them to reside in, and to govern the churches as they were formed. So with St. Peter was *Mark*, whom he calls his son (1 *Pet.* v. 13.) and St. *Clement*, well known in all the Churches. With St. Paul, were *Timothy*, *Titus*, St. *Luke*, and sometimes the same St. *Clement*. Thus *Polycarp* accompanied St. *John*. These holy men applied themselves with all care to learn the doctrine, and to imitate the lives of the apostles. And hereby they were themselves examples to other believers, both by word and conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. They likewise themselves formed disciples, capable of instructing and forming others. And this St. Paul directs *Timothy* to do (2 *Tim.* ii. 2.) *The things which thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also*. Thus was the faith once delivered to the saints: thus was the church, the whole body of Christians from the beginning, the ground and pillar of truth, of all the truths contained in the oracles of God. In the writings therefore of these, not of modern reasoners and disputers, we are to search

search for that sense of scriptures hard to be understood, which they received from the apostles, and the apostles from Christ.

3. The church at *Jerusalem*, the pattern and mother of all churches, was taught and governed by the apostles themselves. And all the members thereof continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayer. All who believed were together and had all things common. They sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, as every man had need. They continued daily with one accord in the temple, and in breaking bread in the house or chamber appointed for it: and eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. Again we read, *The multitude of them that believed, were of one heart, and of one soul, neither said any, that ought of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. And great grace was upon them all, neither was there any among them that wanted: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses, sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles feet. And distribution was made to every man, according as he had need.*

4. This community of goods the ancient philosophers and law-givers often endeavoured, but could never effect: having only punishments to constrain, or reasonings to persuade men to it. And both these were too weak to prevail. Only the grace of Christ could effect it. When this was shed abroad in their hearts, they all looked on each other as brethren, all united in one family, and fed alike by the common care of their Father.

Father. The law of love, so often repeated by their Lord, was continually before their eyes, and by this did all men know they were his disciples, by their love to one another.

5. It is said, that they continued steadfastly in the apostles doctrine; and they are often called, the disciples or learners. They diligently applied themselves to learn all the truths of God, whether by hearing the apostles both in public and private, or by reading and comparing together the holy scriptures, and meditating upon them. It is likewise said, that they continued in prayer, and went daily for that purpose to the temple: probably at the solemn hours of prayer, the third, sixth and ninth, which the Christian church observed for many ages.

6. The other part of their daily service mentioned here, is the breaking of bread, or the Lord's Supper, as the phrase signifies, not in this place alone, but in many others of the New Testament. It was followed by a repast, the use of which continued long in the church, under the name, of *Agape*, or *feasts of love*. And these it is said, *They eat with gladness and singleness of heart*. In a word, all the Christians were as little children, in humility, disinterestedness and purity. By renouncing worldly goods and hopes, they had cut off the occasions of passions and of the uneasinesses of life: so that their minds were wholly taken up with heaven, and their *hope full of immortality*. Thus the church of Jerusalem subsisted near forty years, under the conduct of the apostles, and St. James (the bishop of it) in particular: till the Christians seeing the ruin of that unhappy city to approach, according to the prediction

prediction of their Master, retired out of it to the little town of *Pella*, where they continued in peace and safety.



CH A P. III.

The State of the Heathens before their Conversion.

1. **T**HEY who are unacquainted with history, suppose, that the men who lived seventeen hundred years ago, were more artless, more innocent and more teachable, than those that are now alive. But the writings of those times which still remain; clearly prove the contrary. The crimes, whereof they give us so full accounts, were committed in the face of the sun. No one ran into a corner to commit them, or endeavoured afterwards to conceal them. And the providence of God seems to have preserved these accounts, on purpose to shew, from what an abyss of corruption (described in short by St. *Paul* in the beginning of his epistle to the *Romans*) Jesus Christ delivered the world.

2. The ordinary diversions of the people of *Rome*, were to see men kill one another, or torn in pieces by wild beasts. And the governors of the provinces daily exercised the greatest cruelties upon those who were not *Romans*. The emperors put to death whom they pleased, without any process or trial; whence it was that bad princes

princes shed so much blood, even of the most noble *Romans*. Their avarice was equal to their cruelty; so that all places were full of frauds, of falsehoods, of perjuries, of calumnies, of violences and oppressions.

3. Yet in the midst of the *Roman* empire, yea, of *Rome* itself, Christianity established itself: And that at a time when it was the most enlightened that it ever was, as well as the most corrupted. Nor could it more evidently appear, that the *Gospel* was the power of God, than by its triumphing over those very dispositions, which were of all others most opposite to it. What could be more opposite to the humility of faith and the simplicity of the Christian doctrine, than the haughtiness of self-conscious knowledge, and pride of understanding? What to the inward purity it required, and the strictness of its morality, than that entire depravity of heart, and overflowing corruption of manners?

4. The manner of preaching the *Gospel* was different, according to the dispositions of the hearers. The apostles convinced the *Jews* by proofs drawn from their own prophets, and other parts of holy writ; the *Heathens*, by reasonings, more simple or more subtle, according to their capacity. But what most prevailed on the heathens was, the miracles which were frequent for two hundred years after the apostles, the holy lives of the Christians, and their constancy in sufferings and death.

5. When any one desired to be a Christian, he was brought to the bishop, who carefully examined, what were the motives and causes of his desiring it, and what his life past had been.

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For none were received till they had renounced whatever was contrary to the law of Christ : and given proof for some time, that they were determined to make it the rule of their future life.

6. He who was judged sincere in his desire, was received by the bishop into the number of *Catechumens*. These were not only present at the public exposition of scripture (for so might the *Infidels* themselves) but had *Catechists* appointed for them, whose office it was, to instruct them severally in the *first* principles of Christianity, and to watch over them continually, that their practice might be answerable thereto. The common time for being a *catechumen* was two years : but it might be either longer or shorter. It was always so long, till the person appeared to be changed in heart and life. The names of those who were judged to be thus changed, were given in at the beginning of *Lent*. And these, as well as the faithful, spent that solemn time, in watching, fasting and prayer. In the mean while they were instructed in the creed, and the mysteries of the Christian faith : as to their progress therein, they were frequently examined in the church, before the congregation.

7. Toward the end of *Lent* they were taught the *Lord's prayer*, and instructed in the nature of the sacraments, and having been thus prepared, they were baptized on *Easter-Eve*, that they might rise again with Christ : or on the eve of *Pentecost*, that they might be ready to receive the Holy Ghost. But though these were the stated times of baptism, even till the *tenth* age ; yet they who were in danger of death were

were baptized at any time: as in case of open persecution.

8. The day of baptism being come, the *Catechumen* was brought to the baptistery. This was at first near the church, or in the church porch: afterwards in the church itself. Here, after he had renounced the devil and all his works, he was questioned concerning the faith, and concerning his purpose of leading a Christian life. To which questions he gave distinct answers. He was then baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. At his coming out of the water, a white garment was given him, for a token of the innocence which was now given him, and which he was to take care to preserve without spot unto his life's end. When the persons baptized were infants, their sureties or sponsors (as *Tertullian* calls them) answered for them. Immediately after baptism they were presented to the bishop to be confirmed, by prayer and imposition of hands; and for a long time after they were instructed and assisted, as by the priest, so by those who had witnessed for them, till they were thoroughly perfect in the faith, and fully prepared for every good work.

CHAP.

C H A P. IV.

Of their Prayer and Study of the Scriptures.

1. **T**HOSE who were baptized began to lead a new life, wholly spiritual and supernatural; a life of faith and prayer: remembering the words of their Lord, that *men ought always to pray and not to faint*; they endeavoured to *pray without ceasing*, and used all sorts of means, that the application of their spirit to God, might be interrupted the least that was possible. But of all prayer, they had the greatest esteem for public; as well knowing, the more persons joined together, to beg of God any mercy, the more force their prayers had to obtain it. And the service being ended, they saluted each other, the men the men, and the women the women, with the kiss of peace.

2. But besides their solemn prayers both in public and private, they used particular prayers before all they did: following therein the direction of St. Paul, *Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God, even the Father, by him*. Accordingly, plowing, sowing, reaping, and all their works, were begun and ended in prayer. They prayed when they began to build a house, or to live in it, and on all the common occurrences of life. Their salutations when they met, and at the

the beginning of their letters, were not only expressions of friendship, but prayers.

3. The book of *Psalms* made a great part of their prayers; as including the sum of all the scriptures, and shewing what sentiments a servant of God ought to have, in all the various conditions of life. To these they always joined the reading a part of some of the other holy books: all which the bishops and pastors of the church, explained with all diligence, instructing their flock both publicly and from house to house, and suiting their instructions to their several capacities. But they all along declared, they spake not from themselves, they said nothing new, nothing of their own. They declared, that they were only faithful relators of the gospel of Christ, and of that interpretation thereof, which they had received from their fore-fathers, and their fore-fathers from the apostles. They imprinted in the faithful the utmost abhorrence for all novelties, especially in doctrine. Insomuch that if private Christians heard any discourse which was contrary to the first faith, they did not amuse themselves with disputing, but immediately left the place.

4. What had been read to them in public, out of the holy scriptures, the faithful read again in private. They talked of it in the house and by the way; they meditated thereon day and night. Indeed, particular houses, as St. *Chrysostom* observes, were then churches. Every father being a pastor to his family, instructing his wife, children, servants; exhorting them familiarly, presiding over their joint devotion, and every way assisting to preserve them in the unity

of the church, and to build them up in faith and love.

5. In the mean while they did not neglect to work with their hands, both, that they might avoid idleness, the root of all vices, that they might provide for their own households, and that they might have the more ability to help their brethren. But they took care to choose not only innocent employs, but such as best suited with retirement and humility, and did not too much engage the mind, or dissipate the thoughts: what time they could spare from these, they employed in works of charity: in visiting the sick or afflicted, and assisting whoever stood in need of their assistance. So that the life of a Christian was a continued course of prayer, reading and labour, succeeding each other; and as little as possible interrupted by the necessities of life. Whatever calling they were of, they regarded it always, as only an accessory or help to religion; which they ever remembered was the one single business, that was to take up all their lives. Their profession was, purely and simply to be Christians. They assumed no other distinction: and when they were questioned concerning their name, their country, their condition, their one answer was, "*I am a Christian.*"

CHAP.

C H A P. V.

Of their Fasts, Meals, Modesty
and Serioufness.

1. **T**HE fasts of the ancients were either yearly, as that of *Lent*, which they observed daily till six in the evening; or weekly, as those of *Wednesday* and *Friday*, which they observed till three in the afternoon. The yearly they kept in memory of their Lord, and in obedience to that command, *When the bride-groom shall be taken away, then shall they fast in those days.* And the weekly too were observed throughout the whole church, in remembrance of his passion: because on *Wednesday* the council against him was held, and on *Friday* he was put to death. During the whole *Lent*, many eat only bread and water: some added thereto nuts and almonds: and others were obliged to use different food, according to their different infirmities. But all abstained from wine and delicate meats, during whatever time was set apart for fasting, and spent as large a proportion of it as they could, in retirement, reading and prayer.

2. At all times the meals of Christians were plain and frugal. They did not live to eat, but eat to live. They used only such food and such a measure of it, as was necessary for health and strength. As to the kinds of food, they ate whatever was set before them, except blood and things strangled; from which they carefully abstained,

abstained, according to the decree of the apostles speaking by the Holy Ghost. Some indeed there were in all ages, who eat only herbs with bread and water; not out of any abhorrence of other food; but believing this to be best for their own weakness. No Christians eat with hereticks, or persons excommunicated: but they did sometimes with infidels, that they might not break off all society with them.

3. The same air of modesty appeared in all the other parts of their life. They valued only inward greatness; they esteemed no nobility, but nobleness of soul. They made no account of perishable goods, or of any riches but spiritual. They utterly despised all that luxury had introduced; all the idle expense of magnificent buildings; of costly apparel; of sumptuous furniture, and vessels of gold and silver. Behold the furniture which her persecutors found in the chamber of *Domna*, a rich lady of *Nicodemia*: the *Acts* of the apostles, two mats upon the floor, a wooden box, and an earthen censer.

4. As to their dress, they wore no glaring colours, but mostly white, the emblem of purity. They used no costly stuffs, no rings, jewels, perfumes; nothing fine or delicate; plainness, modesty, gravity and a contempt of ornament, were visible in their whole exterior. They made use of none of the public diversions, but accounted them all abominations; not only as being idolatrous, but as being one great source of the general corruption of manners. And in fact the theatre was no other than a school of immodesty: the amphitheatre, where men fought with each other, or with wild beasts, was evidently a school of

of cruelty. And all these diversions fomented all sorts of passions, which it is the business of Christianity to calm. Therefore it is, that even the races of the *Circus*, which appeared the most innocent, are constantly mentioned, by the fathers, with horror and detestation: not only on account of the idleness they promoted, and the vast expense that attended them; but likewise of the promiscuous converse of men and women, and the factions which reigned there, producing every day quarrels and furious animosities, that often proceeded even to blood.

5. They likewise entirely disapproved of dice, and all other sedentary games, the least mischief of which they judged to be, the nourishing of sloth and idleness. They did not approve of loud laughter, or whatever has a tendency thereto: as light discourses, ludicrous gestures or actions, buffoonery, drollery. They thought all these beneath the dignity of a Christian, and absolutely unworthy his high calling: whose conversation ought to be always good, *to the use of edifying*, that it may *minister grace to the hearers*. They considered, that both our Lord and all his apostles, led the most serious life possible: and that St. Paul condemns by name, that habit of jesting, raillery or facetiousness, which the Heathens ranked among their virtues, as not convenient for a follower of Christ.

6. But as strict as the life of these Christians was, we must not imagine it was melancholy. No, as they *prayed without ceasing*, and in every thing gave thanks, so they *rejoiced evermore*. They were not disquieted by covetousness or ambition. They were free from pride, malice, envy,

envy, and all that train of uneasy passions, by which men of the world are continually tormented: not being attached to the goods of the present life, they were little touched with the calamities of it: having always the peace of a good conscience, the joy of doing well, and a full assurance of the favour of God, both in time and in eternity.

7. Nor did the care of their posterity give them any inquietude. The happiness they wished their children, was no other, than that they desired for themselves, even to finish their course with joy. If they left them orphans, they knew the church would be their mother, and supply all their wants. Thus they lived without care, without fear, without desire of any of the things of the world. But not without pleasure. What pleasure (says *Tertullian*) is greater than "contempt of the world, contempt of death, true liberty, purity of conscience; contentedness with all things? You tread under foot the gods of the Heathens; you heal diseases; you cast out devils; you are led by the Holy Ghost; you live to God. These are the pleasures; these the diversions of Christians."

CHAP.

C H A P. VI.

Of their Marriages, their Union,
and public Assemblies.

1. **W**ITH all this disengagement from the world, the greatest part of the first Christians were married. They were sensible indeed of the vast advantages, which St. Paul observes belong to a single life. And many accordingly chose it, both men and women, for the kingdom of heaven's sake: but they knew, *all men cannot receive this saying*: and therefore never condemned those who did not receive it. Those who bred up orphans generally married them young, and usually to their own children. For interest had nothing to do with their choice, nor indeed any other consideration but the glory of God. In this, as in all important affairs, they failed not to consult the bishop; and when all was fixed, the marriage was publicly and solemnly celebrated in the church, where it was consecrated by the blessing of the pastor, and confirmed by the oblation of the holy eucharist.

2. The happiness of a Christian marriage, is thus represented by *Tertulian*. "Two Christians bear the same yoke together: they are but one flesh and one spirit. They pray together; they prostrate themselves together; they fast together; they instruct; and they exhort each other. They are together in the house of God and at the table of the Lord; in times of persecutions

cutions and peaceful times. They give one another no uneasiness: they conceal nothing from each other: they stir up one another to praise God, to relieve the poor, to visit the sick, and not to be weary of offering any of those sacrifices wherewith God is well pleased."

3. Such was then the life of particular Christians. None regarded himself alone. But all the Christians of one place, considered themselves as only one body. They all knew each other not only by their constantly meeting together in the public assemblies, but likewise by their embracing all opportunities, of opening their hearts to each other in private. Their joys and their griefs were common to all. If one received a particular blessing, they all took part in it; if one fell into sin, they all implored mercy. They lived together as relations, indeed as allied by nearer ties than those of flesh and blood: and called each other, *fathers, children, brethren and sisters*, according to their sex and age.

4. But the strictest union of all was between the bishops of the church. They did nothing of importance, but by common consent. Those of the most distant provinces knew each other, by character, at least, and held correspondence by letters. And this it was easy to do by means of the vast extent of the *Roman* empire; which (as *Origen* remarks) seems to have been formed on purpose, to facilitate the preaching of the gospel. The church indeed soon extended itself beyond the empire on every side. And the farther it extended, the more to be admired was that uniformity of faith and manners which was among all Christians: true religion having corrected

rected in this vast diversity of nations, all the barbarous and unreasonableness of its followers. So that the universal church throughout the whole world, was truly one body, the members whereof, however distant from each other, were all united in one faith, by fervent charity.

5. The account which is given by one of the earliest writers, of their public assemblies, is as follows: "On *Sunday*, all that live either in the city or country, meet together at the same place, where the writings of the prophets and apostles are read; then the bishop instructs and exhorts the people. This ended, we all rise up together (for on all *Sundays* they prayed standing, in memory of the resurrection of our Lord) and pour out our souls in common prayers both for ourselves, and for all others throughout the world. Prayers being over, bread, and a cup of wine and water are brought to the bishop, which he takes, and offers up praise and glory to the Father of all things, through the name of his Son and holy Spirit. The people answer with joyful acclamations, *Amen!* Then the consecrated elements, the eucharistical bread and wine are distributed to, and partaken by, all that are present, and sent to the absent by the hands of the deacons." But the *martyr* adds, "Of this food none are allowed to be partakers, but such only as are true believers, and live according to Christ's precepts. For we do not take this as common bread and common wine, but as the flesh and blood of the incarnate Jesus."

CHAP.

CHAP. VII.

Of their Persecutions.

1. **B**UT notwithstanding the purity of their doctrine, and the unblameableness of their lives, the Christians found what their Lord had told them before, that they should be *hated of all men.* *Because they were not of the world, therefore the world hated them.* Therefore was their name cast out as evil: yea, all manner of evil was said of them falsely; and by all ranks of men; both learned and unlearned; people and magistrates being against them. And the prejudice was such, that they were frequently condemned upon the bare name of *Christian*, without any farther examination. This sufficed to destroy all their good qualities; it being a common saying, "*Caius Sejus is a good man; if he were not a Christian.*"

2. It is no wonder, that this universal prejudice drew many persecutions upon them: a persecution commonly began by some edict forbidding the Christians to meet together. The bishops gave notice of this immediately, and exhorted one another, to redouble their prayers, and to encourage the faithful to *run with patience the race set before them.* Then many retired, and some even of the pastors, while the rest remained with the people, but carefully concealed. Knowing they were the persons, who would be sought for most diligently, as those whose

whose destruction would probably occasion the dispersion of the whole flock. Indeed the rules of the church prohibited any, wilfully to expose themselves to danger, or unnecessarily to provoke the Heathens, and draw persecution upon them.

3. When any Christians were discovered and apprehended, they were brought before the magistrate, who seated on his tribunal, interrogated them, whether they were *Christians*? If they denied it, they were immediately set at liberty, for they knew a *Christian* would not save his life by a lie. If they confessed they were *Christians*, all arts were made use of to vanquish their constancy. First, by persuasion and promises, then by threatenings, and last of all by tortures. Sometimes they endeavoured to surprize them into idolatry, and then persuade them that they could not retract. They had always some idol and altar near. On this they offered victims in their presence: of which they would often force them to eat, or to drink of the wine offered to the idol. But this the *Christians* resisted with all their strength: nay, when incense was laid upon their hands with burning coals, they would not so much as shake off the coals, for fear of seeming to offer the incense.

4. The usual methods to force them to deny the faith, were, to stretch them upon the rack, by cords fastened to their hands and feet, and drawn at both ends by pullies: to hang them up by their hands with weights tied to their feet: to beat them with rods or large battoons, with thongs made of raw hides, or with scourges that had balls of lead, or iron points at the end.

While

While they were stretched on the rack, they frequently applied burning coals or torches to their arms or sides: often at the same time tearing off their flesh with pincers or combs of iron. Inasmuch that the bones being laid bare, and the entrails lying uncovered, the flame entering into the body put an end to the life of the sufferer.

5. They who survived these tortures, and persisted in professing themselves Christians, were either executed or remanded to prison. Their prisons were only another sort of torture, being commonly dark and loathsome dungeons. Here they put fetters upon their hands and feet. Many had large pieces of wood hung at their necks: many were chained in the most uneasy postures, with weights fastened to their legs or arms. Sometimes they strewed the floor with small pieces of glass, or fragments of earthen vessels, on which they stretched out the prisoner, naked as he was, and wounded all over. There they sometimes left them to die of hunger and thirst and the festering of their wounds. At other times they carefully healed them, but it was, that they might torture them anew. They usually forbade their speaking to any person; as knowing that in this condition they had converted many Infidels, and often the jailor, or even the soldiers that guarded them. But they permitted them to converse with any, who were like to shake their resolution; a father, a mother, a child, a wife, whose tender words, or silent eloquence, were another sort of temptation, and often more dangerous than the sharpest torments.

6. In

6. In the mean time their fellow Christians did not forget them. They prayed for them without ceasing. If they were not permitted to minister to them in prison; at least they attended them to the place of their martyrdom. They exhorted them (often to the loss of their own lives) to endure unto the end. They observed their last words, which were commonly prayers, and fortified themselves by their example. Nor was it to martyrs alone, but to confessors also, that they paid the greatest honour; that is, those who had confessed Christ before the magistrate, though they had not yet resisted unto blood.



CHAPTER VIII.

**Their Care of the Poor and Sick,
their Hospitality and Patience.**

1. **T**HE church took care of all who were unable to help themselves, of whatever age or sex: the blind, the lame, the maimed, the decrepid; and these they esteemed the treasure of the church. They took likewise a particular care of children; not only of the orphan children of Christians, but of those whom their Heathen parents exposed, and indeed of all others they could procure. Their end in all was, by means of temporal, to lead them to spiritual good. Therefore, in like circumstances,

they relieved a Christian before a Heathen, and of Christians, the most holy first. For this every church had a common stock, which the deacons distributed according to the orders of the bishop, after giving him an account of the conduct as well as wants of the people committed to his charge.

2. And as soon as a stranger shewed, that he was in the communion of the church, he was received with open arms: for which end the Christians who travelled, took letters of their bishop, declaring the condition of the bearer: whether he was a *catechumen*, a *penitent*, or one of the *faithful*: besides which, there were commendatory letters, to distinguish priests, deacons, confessors, and those who stood in need of any particular assistance.

3. Not that their hospitality was confined to their brethren. It extended to all, Heathens as well as Christians. Of which we have a remarkable instance in the case of St. *Pacomius*, a young *Roman* captain, who being upon his march with his men, and taking up his quarters in a city they came to, was amazed to find the inhabitants receive them with as much affection, as if they had been their old friends. He inquired who they were? And was answered, they were a people of a particular religion, called *Christians*. He desired to be informed, what the grounds of this religion were? And this was the beginning of his conversion.

4. But their care and tenderness toward the sick, was yet more observable. No difficulty, no danger, no discouragements could prevent their ministering to these. When *Alexandria* was dreadfully afflicted with the plague, in the time of

of the Emperor *Valerian*, they confirmed their love even to their persecutors, by assisting such as were infected, though many of them died with them. And the priests constantly visited the sick Christians, administered the holy eucharist, prayed with them and for them, exhorted, comforted, and commended their souls to God. They did not fear, but desire death, as only the gate of eternity. And even when their relations went before them, they less grieved for their own present loss, than they rejoiced for their happy deliverance, and in a steadfast hope of meeting them again in paradise.

5. Such were the manners of the ancient *Christians*: such were the followers of Jesus Christ, both in *faith* and *practice*, while *Heathenism* reigned, and persecution continued. This obliged them to a continual sense of the presence of God, and watchfulness over themselves: every one expecting the hour when he should be betrayed by his wife, his child, or his nearest relation. And herein was seen the patience of the *saints*, then a common name for all Christians. Even in peace they daily looked for the return of war: nor was that peace itself ever entire, for many Christians suffered, even to blood, where there was no open persecution: and many of them were spoiled and pillaged with impunity even at noon-day. Or, if oppression and violence ceased for a while, contempt and hate never ceased. To speak and write all manner of evil of the Christians, to revile, to mock at them, to turn them into ridicule: this was not only permitted, but approved, applauded, authorized. But this moved them not:

not: neither unjust contempt, nor ill-ground-
ed calumnies drew from them any murmuring
or complaint. They continually returned good
for evil. They laboured, if it had been possi-
ble, to live peaceably with all men. They stu-
died all ways of gaining their affections. They
conformed to all their innocent customs. And
of so doing, they were never tired, never over-
come with evil, even where they could not over-
come evil with good.

6. Their patience shone most with regard to
princes and magistrates. Nothing could force
them, *to speak evil of dignities*. They honoured
them as the ministers of God. They paid them
all the obedience which consisted with their
duty to him. Pressed as they were by such injus-
tice and unheard-of cruelties, they never thought
of taking up arms for their defence. So far
from it, that as numerous as the Christian sol-
diers were in all the *Roman* armies, they never
made use of the arms they had in their hands,
but according to the orders of their generals.
Nay, we see the entire legion of *St. Mauritius*,
known by the name of the *Theban* legion, suf-
fering themselves to be massacred without resist-
ance, rather than be wanting in their duty to
God or *Cesar*.

7. This invincible patience forced at length all
the powers of the world to submit to the gos-
pel. These persecutions continued, till in little
more than *three hundred years*, there was a pro-
digious number of Christians of all ranks and
conditions. And hence came the extreme cru-
elty of the last persecution. But this, like all
the rest, only extended Christianity farther, and
established

established it so much the more firmly, till the Emperor *Constantine* declared himself its protector. The *Christians* then began to live at ease, but at the same time they began to lose the *Christian spirit*. The *world* mixing with the church, effected as a friend what it never could while an open enemy: it transfused its own spirit into the servants of Christ, who became insensibly *lovers of the world*, lovers of themselves, and *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*. For with the *love of the world* entered every *unholy* desire, every *earthly, sensual, devilish* passion: which from that time have abounded more and more, and so shall do, till the time approaches for the restitution of all things.

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